

The Pleasure of Reading the Bible

By Temple Scott



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THE PLEASURE OF READING THE BIBLE

HE Bible is not one book; it is a library of books; a literature in itself. It is the ancient literature of the people of Israel, embodying the best exercise of the creative imagination in poetry, romance, history, oratory and prophecy, of the people who believed themselves to be the chosen people of God. It is also the ethical code of both Jews and Christians, and the source of rabbinical exposition and Church Theology. In dealing with this book, however, as a means for giving pleasure, I must disregard its authoritative value for religion or theology. The religious

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emotion is not primarily pleasurable; nor is theology literature. The purpose of religion is directive to conduct; it is based on the existence of a definite relation between the individual and an accepted objective ideal. Pleasure is directive to nothing; it is the emotion experienced from a freedom from any relation, when the individual is most himself. The two, therefore, are antithetical. This is not, however, to say that the religious man cannot experience pleasure, or that the man of pleasure may not be deeply religious. Each can be the other; but, in being each, he is not, for the time being, the other. The Sermon on the Mount can be read for the purpose of fortifying a faith in Christ; but it can also be read for the sake of the beauty of its literary form, its noble language, its suggestive influence on the

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mind for cherishing an inspiring ideal. The pleasure from this is the purest and most satisfying of all pleasures, because it affirms and fulfils the self.

When I speak of the Bible I mean the English translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek Testament. The translators of these writings tapped the purest springs of the English language. Whether or no they rendered the exact meanings of the original words of the Hebrew and Greek texts is, in this connection, of small matter. As it has been given us, in the Authorised and Revised Versions, the Bible is the noblest monument of English we possess; a book of magnificent language embodying the aspirations of men and women for an ideal to be cherished as an abiding influence on life.

It is the reading of this book for the

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sake of the pleasure to be derived from the reading that I am now urging; and I am urging this because, in the first place, the pleasure is purifying and, in the second place, because I believe we are losing that freshness of outlook and that child-like naïveté which are so essential to pure enjoyment, and which are especially essential to the reading of the Bible. Our Puritan forefathers had these qualities. When the Bible was first given to them it became for them a universal solvent, a comfort and a joy. What the discovery and the translations of the Greek and Latin classics did for the Renaissance, the translation of the Bible did for the Reformation. It brought about a new birth, a re-awakening of men's spirits. Men and women knew each other again, and joyed in the knowledge. An ideal was revealed which

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each could cherish in his own soul; and a new language was in the people's mouths:

“Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

“For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me into the way everlasting.”

“Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”

“God made not death; neither delighteth He when the living perish. For He created all things that they might have being; and the

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generative powers of the world are healthsome, and there is no poison of destruction in them . . . for righteousness is immortal."

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. . . . Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

The compelling power precipitated from words rightly placed is enough in itself to make converts. The mind is lifted by the beauty of the language and placed on the high road to faith: the pleasure has paved the way. To men and women, "looking before and after and pining for what is not," such words as I have quoted must have come like the sound of refreshing waters to the thirsty traveller. They carried a music in them that charmed quite apart from the comforting message they bore. The people marched to the music, they fought to

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the sound of it, and they died with it ringing joyously in their ears, the while their souls were dancing to it. Unhappily, to later generations, the freshness of the music wore off; the message alone was heard, and heard without the music, robbed of its virgin vivifying beauty. Teachers then became fanatics; soldiers dogmatists; and the people spiritually barren. Science and trade, with their siren voices, led to the worship of false gods where beauty is not; men fought for wealth and killed each other for a creed. Beauty fled, a hunted thing, to dwell in lonely places, and now the music of the Bible is rarely heard at all. Even where, in some quiet spot, a sincere shepherd may be found piping to his flock, his voice is often uncouth, and his fingers have not been taught the cunning of their use. What we too often hear are

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brazen-mouthing teachers blatantly repeating the words; but the noise that comes from them is that of sounding brass, as if they were counting the coins of their wage—the harp and the psaltery are no more. Yet can I well imagine a Salvini in the pulpit speaking the words of the Bible in such fashion as to put a tongue in every sense and set the hearts of his hearers again dancing to the organ music:

“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.”

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.”

*“Sing, O heavens:
And be joyful, O earth;
And break forth into singing, O mountains;
For the Lord hath comforted his people,
And will have compassion upon his afflicted.”*

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Why are not ministers of religion more generally taught the art of reading this Bible aloud, that its language might be listened to and its music be made known in all its many tones of exquisite sound? It is an education devoutly to be wished for.

Biblical criticism and modern science may have settled this or that fact. The story of the creation as we read it in Genesis may or may not appeal to the sophisticated reason of the day; but the reader of this story, if he is to know its real pleasure-giving power, must deal with it in quite a different fashion from that of the critic. It will be sufficient for him that the writer of the story believed it; and by the writer I mean the translators just as much as I do the author of the Hebrew original; for only because of the influence of such a belief can I ac-

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count for the excellence of the later expression. It is the excellence born of sincerity, a sincerity that is stamped everywhere in the Bible, and that makes its language so arresting and so appealing.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be Light: and there was Light. And God saw the Light that it was good: and God divided the Light from the Darkness. And God called the Light Day; and the Darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning was the first day.”

The arresting impressiveness lies in the telling simplicity of the language that holds the poet's imaginative thought amply and completely: not a drop is spilt. Out of this telling simplicity comes a fulfilling music of words in-

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evitably placed that soothes the ear: “And darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” The words with their music send us feeling with Wordsworth—

*“A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.”*

With what a fine reiteration does this same sense steal over us in reading of God’s covenant with Noah! How nobly simple is the language of the poet’s child-like naïveté of intimacy, expressing his own soul’s relation with nature and nature’s God!

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“And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh: And the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud: and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant.”

God was very real to this writer, as real to him as the spirit that “rolls through all things” was to Wordsworth. The personification is the poet’s way of making his thought visual so that his readers might be, with him, in the same living relation to it. The rainbow in the cloud, coming as it did with the cheering light of the smiling sun, spoke to him of divine clemency after storm; filled him

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with the benignancy of the quiet, cool atmosphere after summer's heavy showers, and coloured an imagination tranquilised after the fear from the raging elements. It became the symbol of a covenant between God and man, of security and life.

In the art of story-telling the writer of the human tale of Joseph and his brethren has very rarely been surpassed. The narrative opens simply and moves along gently, reaching its climax of emotion by the very force of the situation brought about. It is nowhere strained, nowhere marred by attempts at the grandiose or pathetic. It is a delightful example of the power of sincerity in the telling of a tale. Who can read unmoved Joseph's final words, when he reveals himself to his brothers? "I am Joseph: doth my father yet live?" But

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it is all so simple, so direct and so finely inevitable in its simplicity and directness.

The splendid imagery of Jacob's farewell words to his sons is another instance of the wonder-working literary art of the Biblical writers. It is an appeal, a benediction, a touching of spirits to fine issues, a father's prophetic insight into his children's characters, and all couched in noble words nobly ordered. It reads like an ode addressed to the founders of a new nation:

*“Reuben, thou art my first-born,
My might, and the beginning of my strength;
The excellency of dignity, and the excellency
of power.
Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.*

* * *

*“Simeon and Levi are brethren;
Weapons of violence are their swords.
O my soul, come not thou into their council;
Unto their assembly, my glory, be not thou
united;*

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*For in their anger they slew men,
And in their self-will houghed oxen.
Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce;
And their wrath, for it was cruel:
I will divide them in Jacob,
And scatter them in Israel.*

*“Judah, thee shall thy brethren praise:
Thy hand shall be on the neck of thine enemies;
Thy father’s sons shall bow down before thee.
Judah is a lion’s whelp;
From the prey, my son, thou art gone up:
He stooped down, he couched as a lion,
And as a lioness; who shall rouse him up?
The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
Till he come to Shiloh,
Having obedience of the peoples.
Binding his foot unto the vine,
And his ass’s colt unto the choice vine;
He hath washed his garments in wine,
And his vesture in the blood of grapes:
His eyes shall be red with wine,
And his teeth white with milk.”*

From such a stock were born the tribes
who founded a new nation and ordered a

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new commandment. Is it any wonder that they did great deeds and saw visions? Who shall dare hope to win against men who walk with God, and see their ideals in all living things, and who make the ideal appear in the work of their hands? This was the spirit with which Palestine was nationalized; it was the spirit in which the great mission bearers conquered. It is the spirit in which alone abiding work can be accomplished. It is the power that lies in all noble expressions, and gives meaning and value to all literature. Poets have made more heroes in the flesh than they have pictured in their language. That is what they are for—through noble language to attune hearts and inspire minds to doing nobly and being noble. Otherwise literature has no place in life. I go back in thought and find the solution of

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England's greatness in the past and America's foundation in the present to the moving influence of this English Bible on our Puritan forefathers. It was a trumpet-blast calling on them as the hosts of the Lord to fight the battles of the Lord; it was a revelation of man's equality in the sight of the Lord; it was a realization of a living ideal by which men might come to live in peace and joy together; and it was also a glorious message of hope.

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”

The light that shined on the people of England in King James's and King Charles's days came from this Bible. Life, because of it, took on new and lovely colours, and men braced them-

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selves to live it anew. What they had once dared as barons they now dared as yeomen; and the fathers who dared King Charles bred sons who dared King George. Thus does literature justify itself.

What must have been in the hearts of the children of Israel as they listened to Moses' song, on the eve of his death, when in sight of the Promised Land?

*“ Give ear, ye heavens, and I will speak;
And let the earth hear the words of my mouth:
My doctrine shall drop as the rain,
My speech shall distil as the dew;
As the small rain upon the tender grass,
And as the showers upon the herb:
For I will proclaim the name of the Lord.*

*“ For all his ways are judgement:
A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,
Just and right is He.”*

Do these same children of Israel hear
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these words now? Does their music make glad their spirits? Surely, if words mean anything, these words mean the same to-day that they meant thousands of years ago! God is still a God of faithfulness, if we remain true to our ideal. He is still without iniquity, if we keep our own natures clean. He remains just and right, so long as we live justly and rightly, each to the other. But we have missed the pleasure of reading this Bible, and no longer hear its inspiring music. I must believe that we have misunderstood this wonderful book; that we have allowed ourselves to be led astray and so lost the sense for pure enjoyment. If we have read the letter we have been altogether blind to the spirit—the spirit of Beauty, which is in the Bible as it is in the Iliad, as it is in the Divine Comedy, as it is in Shakespeare, in Milton, in

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Keats, in Wordsworth, and in all great manifestations of literary art.

The conforming Jew reads the Psalms every Sabbath day, until he has learned them by rote. They appear in his daily prayers and reappear in the devotional exercises on festival and fast days. He can chant them by number, and recite them at command. Has he accomplished more than a feat of the memory? Has the poet's music stirred his soul to finer impulses through purer pleasure? Let his life answer the questions. But the same questions may be asked of the Christian also. The truth is we have spoiled our taste for this splendid literature by making its reading a task instead of a life-giving delight. When the child at school is compelled to learn by rote Wordsworth's "Lucy Gray," or Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark," or Keats's "Ode

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to a Nightingale," or a hundred lines from Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," the child cannot possibly see the revealing beauty in these poems. Its mind is centered on quite a different object, the object of accomplishing an ordered exercise. For the child to see beauty it must come on beauty, so to speak. Beauty must startle it into an awareness of something strange in its experience. Then will the child's curious soul be drawn to the revelation, and it will nevermore forget the meeting. In exactly the same way all great literature must be approached—gently led to delightful surprises. If the mood be not upon us it is wiser to leave the reading alone. "Soft stillness and the night become the touches of sweet harmony." Let the right atmosphere be made and the right mood realized before you listen to the poet's

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songs. Then will such a psalm as the nineteenth lift your spirit on self-born wings:

*“The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament showeth his handiwork.
Day unto day uttereth speech,
And night unto night sheweth knowledge.
There is no speech nor language;
Their voice is not heard.*

*“Their line is gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.
In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,
Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his
chamber,
And rejoiceth as a strong man to run his
course.
His going forth is from the end of the
heavens,
And his circuit unto the ends of it;
And there is nothing hid from the heat
thereof.*

*“The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the
soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making
wise the simple.*

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The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart:

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes:

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever:

The ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

“More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold;

Sweeter also than honey and the droppings of the honeycomb.”

Or this exquisite confession of God's protective influence, as embodied in the twenty-third Psalm:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul:

He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his names' sake.

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

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*I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.*

*“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;
My cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”*

The poetry of devotion must be gently dealt with, otherwise we are in danger of adulterating its fine aroma. The poet's mood must be our mood, or we shall altogether miss the music. The hour that fits Burns's “The Jolly Beggars” is not the hour for Tennyson's “In Memoriam,” and the mood meet for the story of Samson and Delilah shuns the Sermon on the Mount. The Bible must be treated fairly, as we would any other work of accepted literature. One need not read at all if the ear be not inclined.

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If the singing of songs is the natural demand, then sing songs. We are no longer children to do this or that at a bidding. It were well that children were also dealt with in a proper fashion. It is unseemly to force or be forced, and unjust to your author. When we shall have learned to be less familiar and more courteous to the Bible we shall not only value it with livelier discrimination, but the book itself will yield to us, more and more benignantly, the fine enjoyment of its beauty.

Rich as the Bible is in poetry of devotion, it is as rich in lyrical poetry. The Book of Psalms is full of lyrics, and the Song of Solomon is an entire series of love lyrics. These latter are exquisitely beautiful:

*“I am a rose of Sharon,
A lily of the valleys.*

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“ *As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood,
So is my beloved among the sons.
I sat down under the shadow with great de-
light,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.
He brought me to the banqueting house,
And his banner over me was love.*

“ *Stay ye me with raisins, refresh me with
apples;
For I am sick from love.
Let his left hand be under my head,
And his right hand embrace me.*

* * *

“ *The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh,
Leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping upon the hills.
My beloved is like a roe or a young hart:
Behold, he standeth behind our wall;
He looketh in at the windows;
He glanceth through the lattice.
My beloved spake and said unto me,
Arise up, my love, my fair one, and come
away.*

“ *For, lo, the winter is past;
The rain is over and gone;*

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*The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our
land;
The fig-tree ripeneth her green figs,
And the vines are in blossom;
They give forth their fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”*

These songs of love between a husband and wife must be read in their complete sequence to enjoy their pulsating melody. Whatever secondary interpretation the criticism of theologians may offer by way of explanation, the poems must continue to appeal because of the response they find in every true lover's heart. “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.”

The writers of the Bible possessed a gift which few modern writers possess; they had the power to express the philosophy of life as literature. The Book

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of Job is a masterly dramatic allegory, the language of which rises to the highest form of poetical expression. The Proverbs of Solomon may be arranged, as Professor Moulton has arranged them, so that they form sonnets. He has also divided the Book of Ecclesiastes into essays, epigrams, sonnets, and “wisdom clusters.” But the Book of Job stands supreme, among its kind, in all literature. We shall best accept it as the poetic tragedy of a noble mind struggling to find a reasonable basis for faith in God’s divine judgments and finding peace at last in a realization that faith is better than knowledge and is the profoundest wisdom the human soul can attain.

Job had been a wealthy man. He feared God and walked in the ways of righteousness. Suddenly, in one single day, ruin came upon him. He lost his

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flocks, his camels, his home and his family. He barely had time to realize the calamities that had befallen him when he himself was afflicted by a loathsome disease. He became an outcast and a dweller with the dogs on the village ash-mound. As he lived there wondering why God had thus punished him, his friends came to argue with him by way of explaining the reason for his afflictions. Each, according to his point of view, tells him that sin is the cause of all misfortune in life, and that he must have sinned grievously to be thus visited by God's anger. Job cannot understand this. He never believed he was a perfect man; but if God is all-powerful, why does he not pardon his sin, so that he may pass into "the land of darkness and of the shadow of death" with some little of comfort to himself? One of

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his friends thereupon asks him: “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” And he advises him to be good and of faith in God:

*“If thou set thine heart aright,
And stretch out thine hands toward Him;
If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away,
And let no unrighteousness dwell in thy tents;
Surely then shalt thou lift up thy face without
spot;
Yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not
fear.”*

Job answers: “No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you . . . The tents of the robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure. Why does God permit these things? Why should evil succeed and good be punished?” He

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tries to find the meaning in this seeming paradox, and is driven along two lines of thought. Either God's world is void of meaning, a world in which evil must triumph; or it may be that all things will be righted in a world to come, in a future life. Either way, however, does not comfort Job, because he is consumed by a passionate desire to vindicate himself now, while he is yet in the flesh, before the people he knew in the days of his prosperity who have falsely interpreted the cause of his degradation. In a series of remarkably dramatic speeches the argument is taken up by each of the actors in turn, until God Himself, as a Voice out of the whirlwind, interrupts the speakers and, in a poem of magnificent grandeur, humbles Job to the very dust. Then does Job realize that true wisdom is not to be found in knowledge but in faith. When

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he has realized this in its fulness he is able to say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” But he comes to this wisdom only after he has been shown that the mystery of evil is but the least of the mysteries of the universe. The Divine argument is so wonderfully embodied that Job is overwhelmed, and can but brokenly cry: “I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be restrained Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Here is a portion of the Divine Argument by which God revealed Himself to Job and brought him to a sense of the

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profound and purifying humility of ignorance that leads him to faith:

*“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations
of the earth?*

*Declare, if thou hast understanding,
Who determined the measures thereof, if thou
knowest?*

Or who stretched the line upon it?

*Whereupon were the foundations thereof
fastened?*

*Or who laid the cornerstone thereof,
When the morning stars sang together,
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?*

*“Or who shut up the sea with doors,
When it brake forth, as if newly born;
When I made clouds the garment thereof,
And thick darkness a swaddling-band for it,
And marked out for it my bound,
And set bars and doors,
And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no
further;
And here shall thy proud waves be stayed?*

*“Hast thou commanded the morning since thy
days began,
And caused the dayspring to know its place?*

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*Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?
Or hast thou walked in the recesses of the
deep?*

*Have the portals of the grave been revealed
unto thee?*

*Or hast thou seen the gates of the shadow of
death?*

*Hast thou comprehended the earth in its
breadth?*

Declare, if thou knowest it all!

“ *Where is the way to the dwelling place of
light?*

*And as for darkness, where is the place
thereof,*

*That thou shouldest take it to the bound
thereof,*

*And that thou shouldest discern the paths to
the house thereof?*

*Doubtless thou knowest, for thou wast then
born,*

And the number of thy days is great!

“ *Canst thou bind the cluster of the Pleiades,
Or loose the bands of Orion?*

*Canst thou lead forth the signs of the Zodiac
in their season?*

Or canst thou guide the Bear with her train?

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*Knowest thou the ordinances of the heavens?
Canst thou establish the dominion thereof in
the earth? ”*

Well, indeed, may Job have exclaimed: “ What shall I answer thee? I lay mine hand upon my mouth.” The argument is a sublime poem of a mighty execution. The creative genius of this poet has here never been surpassed. He may worthily take his place by the side of Homer, Dante and Milton. But the whole book is, indeed, one of the marvels of literature.

In *Ecclesiasticus*, one of the so-called Apocryphal books of the Bible, there is a little essay on Friendship which deserves re-setting, even though the subject has been dealt with by many writers since, from Bacon downwards.

“ Sweet words,” says this counsellor, “ will multiply a man’s friends; and a

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fair-speaking tongue will multiply courtesies. Let those that are at peace with thee be many; but thy counsellors one of a thousand. If thou wouldest get thee a friend, get him by proving, and be not in haste to trust him. For there is a friend that is so far his own occasion, and he will not continue in the day of thy affliction. And there is a friend that turneth to enmity; and he will discover strife to thy reproach. And there is a friend that is a companion at the table, and he will not continue in the day of thy affliction; and in thy prosperity he will be as thyself, and will be bold over thy servants; if thou shalt be brought low, he will be against thee, and he will hide himself from thy face. Separate thyself from thine enemies; and beware of thy friends. A faithful friend is a strong defence; and he that hath found him

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hath found a treasure. There is nothing that can be taken in exchange for a faithful friend; and his excellency is beyond price. A faithful friend is a medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him. He that feareth the Lord directeth his friendship aright; for as he is, so is his neighbour also.”

From *Ecclesiastes* I take the liberty to quote, in Professor Moulton’s setting a portion of the twelfth chapter, which he entitles, “The Coming of Evil Days”:

“ *Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth!*
Or ever the evil days come,
And the years draw nigh,
When thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them:

“ *Or ever the sun,*
And the light,
And the moon,

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*And the stars,
Be darkened,
And the clouds return after the rain:*

*“ In the days when the keepers of the house
shall tremble,
And the strong men shall bow themselves,
And the grinders cease because they are few,
And those that look out of the windows be
darkened,
And the door shall be shut in the street;*

*“ When the sound of the grinding is low,
And one shall rise up at the voice of a bird;
And all the daughters of music shall be
brought low;*

*“ Yea, they shall be afraid of that which is
high,
And terrors shall be in the way;*

*“ And the almond tree shall blossom,
And the grasshopper shall be a burden,
And the caperberry shall burst:*

*“ Because man goeth to his long home,
And the mourners go about the streets:*

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*“Or ever the silver cord be loosed,
Or the golden bowl be broken,
Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,
Or the wheel broken at the cistern:*

*“And the dust return to the earth,
As it was;
And the spirit return unto God
Who gave it.”*

The Preacher prefixes this beautifully sombre poem with a short exhortation written in prose as beautiful, and revealing his kindly and sweet sympathy for the frailty of human nature and the evanescence of human life:

“Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all; and remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know then, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and

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put away evil from thy flesh: for youth and the prime of life are vanity."

But this tone is not the prevailing tone of the Bible, which is one of splendid optimism. Only serve the Lord and it shall be well with you—that is the keynote of the Hebrew Scriptures; it is also its practical value for life. Even Isaiah rejoices in this truth:

*"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him
That bringeth good tidings, that publisheth
peace,
That bringeth good tidings of good, that
publisheth salvation:
That saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth."*

That is the secret revealed. Everything is beautiful, everything is right, everything is good, because God reigneth. From this fountain did Browning drink

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his joyous faith: "God's in His heaven.
All's right with the world."

The lasting appeal in the New Testament is made as the Gospel of Love. That is the revelation it brought to mankind; and it has been embodied largely, not in poetry, but in prose. The prose, however, is of so excellent a quality that its words have passed into our current speech; so that if we use them even carelessly they have yet an arresting power to make us pause and give us thought. The Sermon on the Mount and the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians are together the finest flowers of speech containing this gospel. The sermon, however, is expressed in the language as of one in authority; the epistle is argumentative and persuasive. Christ spoke to eager listeners; Paul wrote to cultured thinkers. Yet when Paul comes

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to the subject of love he rises to finely moving eloquence:

“If I speak with the tongue of men and angels,” he says, *“but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envicth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part: but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child I spoke as a child,*

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I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even also as I have been known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

It is not possible to read this language senseless to the power of words. The magical art of the writer is almost a piece of wizardry. He rings the changes on the word, turning it this way and that way, until the mind of the reader has exhausted its own experiences in following the writer's argument. And after the kaleidoscope has been turned in every direction, the final appeal is made to the personal emotion; but so deftly made that the reader is not conscious of having been led to a conviction, but believes he has brought himself to it. And yet the con-

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viction would be worth little were there no response in the reader's heart to the truth; were there no possibility of the relation between him and the ideal presented to him. It is because of this possibility that Paul's epistle will be read so long as men shall walk the earth. It belongs, with the rest of the Bible, to that body of work of the creative imagination which in song, oration, romance and story, has attempted to spell the experiences of life in the language of beauty, and given to striving and travailing men and women a joyous hope in each to-morrow in the happiness of each to-day. For literature is less than life; it is not our master, but our servant. The gods well know how profoundly and pathetically we still need the help.

I have tried, in as few words as I could express it, to show that the Bible, taking

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it as literature only, may be read for the pleasure it affords. I have tried to emphasize fruitfully the purity of that pleasure, leading as it does, to the cultivation of our sense of beauty in language and thought; and to an awareness of beauty in all things. I have done this, in the first place, because I believe there is no one book, in all the literatures of the world, that so amply and so bravely searches all that can affect our minds and hearts. It is a panorama of life in action, of the struggle of man against nature and himself and of his reconciliation with nature and himself; it is a pageant of the progress of peoples to the making of nations; it is a body of poetry and prose singing of the joy of living for life's sake, and the joy of loving for all sakes. It is, finally, the record in imperishable speech of the dis-

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covery of how man redeemed himself by achieving an ideal.

In the second place, it has seemed to me proper to do this, in order that I might help to reinstate the Bible in its rightful place. It has too long been allowed to rest, in lordly isolation, to be guarded by augurs from the common touch, as if it required interpreters to explain its hidden secrets. The Bible will never be known after this fashion. There are no secrets in it that any true heart cannot know. There is nothing to explain. It is a book to take by the hand; to turn to in hours of joy; to look to in times of sorrow; and to accept at all times as the sincere efforts of men and women like ourselves toward perfection. Above all, it is a book to be happy with.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I

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will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

A List of Books for Bible Reading

THE BIBLE. (Authorized Version)

The Oxford University Press publish *Helps to the Study of the Bible* with one of its editions of the Revised Version. This may be bought separately, and will be found to be of great assistance to the student.

THE MODERN READER'S BIBLE, presented in literary form. Edited by Richard G. Moulton.

LITERARY STUDY OF THE BIBLE. By Richard G. Moulton.

Professor Moulton's book is unquestionably the best book in the language for the literary study of the Bible. I cannot recommend it too highly. In *The Modern Reader's Bible* will be found notes, historical introduction, and literary introduction, which the student will do well to read. Professor Moulton has also issued a *Short Introduction to the Literature of the Bible*. The essential matter of both these books, however, will be found contained in the appendices to his *The Modern Reader's Bible* (one vol. edit.).

INTRODUCTION TO THE LITERATURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. By S. R. Driver.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. By B. W. Bacon.

OUTLINES FOR THE STUDY OF BIBLICAL HISTORY AND LITERATURE. By F. H. Sanders and H. T. Fowler.

BIBLICAL INTRODUCTION. By W. H. Bennett and W. F. Adeney.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ISAIAH. By T. K. Cheyne.

HISTORY OF THE JEWISH CHURCH. By A. P. Stanley.

Stanley's work is not now considered the most authoritative, since it does not include the results of the latest researches; but it is, nevertheless, a delightful book, and is written in a captivating style. His shortcomings could easily be supplemented from Hastings's *Bible Dictionary*.

HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL By Ernest Renan.

HISTORY OF NEW TESTAMENT TIMES. By Shailer Mathews.

TRADITIONS AND BELIEFS OF ANCIENT ISRAEL.
By T. K. Cheyne.

BIBLE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE. By J. H. Gardiner.

BIBLE DICTIONARY. By James Hastings and others.

THE LITERARY MAN'S BIBLE. By W. L. Courtney.

The author does not treat the Bible as a religious book. He considers it as a storehouse of literature. He gives extracts to illustrate the history, the poetry and the fiction it contains, and adds prefatory remarks to each.

THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE. By Samuel McComb, D.D.

A concise account of the English Bible from the time of its translation to the last revision.

THE SOUL OF THE BIBLE. Being Selections from the Old and the New Testaments and the Apocrypha, Arranged as Synthetical Readings. Edited by Ulysses E. B. Pierce.

LECTURES ON ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS. By F. W. Robertson.

GENERAL VIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE. By B. F. Westcott.

SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH.
By Julius Wellhausen.

GOSPEL OF JOY. By Rev. Stopford A. Brooke.

CHRISTIAN MODERN LIFE. By Rev. Stopford A. Brooke.

I include these two volumes of sermons not because they are necessary to the literary study of the Bible, but in order that my readers may see how a literary man extracts the value of life from the thoughts and examples the Bible furnishes him. Mr. Brooke's Sermons are among the best expressions he has given us.



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